

THE NEOLITHIC OF EUROPE

PAPERS IN HONOUR OF ALASDAIR WHITTLE

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Edited by

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DANIELA HOFMANN AND JOSHUA POLLARD



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Front cover: Alleskoven dolmen, Denmark (Vicki Cummings).

Back cover: La Table des Marchands, France (Vicki Cummings); a reconstructed LBK longhouse in the Paris basin (Penny Bickle); Carrowmore, Ireland (Vicki Cummings); an excavation in progress at the Herpaly tell, Hungary (Pál Raczky).

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Tabula gratulatoria

In publishing this volume, the editors, contributors and publishers congratulate Alasdair on his contribution to many aspects of prehistoric archaeology: theoretical, practical and interpretational. His work and his teaching have been inspirational to the discipline as a whole and, in particular, to several generations of students, many of whom have gone on to make their own contribution.

The following wish to join us in congratulating Alasdair, and in celebrating his contribution to archaeology (so far).

Umberto Alberella	Christopher Evans	Francesco Menotti
Mike Allen	Linda Fibiger	Nicky Milner
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Buried in mud, buried in clay: specially arranged settlement burials from in and around the Danubian Sárköz, Neolithic southern Hungary

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It is no exaggeration to say that 20 years' working and brainstorming with Alasdair Whittle has had an impact on ways of posing questions and seeking answers in researching early sedentary lifeways in the Carpathian basin. One key area of our common research is the Sárköz in the south Hungarian Danube floodplain and its adjacent hills in Transdanubia. In the Neolithic and early Chalcolithic periods (sixth to fifth millennium cal BC) several major currents can be detected, from the time of the first farmers of Balkan origin, through the LBK to the Lengyel culture representing the late Neolithic of the western Carpathian basin. Our research is fundamentally based on the archaeological record, supplemented by geoaarchaeological, zooarchaeological, osteological, aDNA and isotope analyses, a palaeopathological investigation, and absolute dating modelled with Bayesian statistics. Out of the Sárköz Neolithic, traces of some peculiar burial customs will be presented in this paper.

Becoming involved in the ERC project *The Times of Their Lives*, led by Alasdair Whittle and Alex Bayliss, over the many years of common work the title may be slightly paraphrased as 'The times of *our* lives'. At first sight, this switch might seem a little pretentious. However, for anyone familiar with Alasdair's contribution to Neolithic studies in the Carpathian basin (among other regions) and with the work of our Neolithic research team during the past two decades, there can be no doubt that 'the times of Neolithic communities' is, concurrently, also the time of our professional lives as archaeologists and simultaneously the

time of our generation, too. Clearly, our interest in roughly the same sorts of problems steered our approach and our thoughts on these issues in a more or less similar direction.

Introduction

The Sárköz, a floodplain along the southern course of the Hungarian Danube, and in more general terms the southern and western parts of Transdanubia, form one of the key regions that witnessed the transformation to sedentary and farming life at the onset of the sixth millennium cal BC. This landscape reflects a great many local and, apparently, irreversible changes with an impact on a vast area of central Europe. The main questions for the beginnings of sedentary life in the Sárköz are connected with the fact that this was the last setting along the Balkan–Danubian route to host migrant groups who had come directly from south-east Europe (Bánffy 2013; Bánffy *et al.* 2014). This landscape, which seems marginal when inspected from both south-eastern and central European perspectives, reflects multiple episodes of cultural and also genetic influx from the northern Balkans over the sixth and early fifth millennium cal BC. Most of these changes had a major impact on the Neolithic transition over a vast area of central Europe.

In this paper we report on some unusual burials from two of the Sárköz Neolithic settlements and one from the adjacent hills, dating from the sixth to fifth millennium cal BC (Bánffy 2013; Bánffy *et al.* 2014; Jakucs and Voicsek 2015; Marton and Oross 2012; Oross *et al.* 2016a), as

this area was, at least in part, involved in our large joint project.

The first of our sites is that of Alsónyék-Bátaszék, situated in the south-western part of the Tolna Sárköz region in Transdanubia (Fig. 5.1). The site lies at the western edge of the Sárköz region, at a boundary zone between the Danube alluvial plain and the cooler and more humid, forested Transdanubian hilly region. The long history of the site covers almost the entire sixth and the first part of the fifth millennium cal BC, with four main occupation periods (Starčevo, LBK, Sopot, Lengyel). During a rescue excavation covering 25ha, carried out between 2006 and 2009, settlements and burials were unearthed (Osztás *et al.* 2012). Our first case study with unusual burials comes from the Starčevo period of Alsónyék.

After the end of intensive Starčevo occupation at Alsónyék, at the end of the fifty-sixth century cal BC, currently available data suggest a short period when the site must have been left uninhabited. A few hundred years later, in the central part of the investigated area, a Linearbandkeramik culture (LBK) settlement with longpits flanking about fifty longhouses was established, dating from the fifty-fourth to forty-ninth century cal BC. The importance of this settlement lies, amongst others, in its pottery assemblage, which shows close links with the early Vinča style of the northern Balkans, and thus fits into a group of sites with similar assemblages both in this region and further south, which are currently under investigation (Jakucs and Voicsek 2015; Marton and Oross 2012).

An extended site was recently investigated at Tolna-Mözs, where 47 typical LBK longhouses were uncovered in three clusters (with many more identified through geophysical prospection). The pottery assemblage linked to the southern cluster of houses contained several sherds recalling late Starčevo wares, as well as a significant proportion of early Vinča-type finds, while early LBK types are also significant. The finds from the middle house cluster consisted of early LBK and Vinča-type fragments, while the northern house cluster yielded Vinča-like and late LBK material. A series of settlements with a similarly peculiar combination of pottery forms and decorations have since been identified nearby. This phenomenon challenged our notions of the entire chronological sequence: the cultural differences within the LBK ‘culture’ are often more striking than those between two separate ‘cultures’. The crucial question in this case is how we should define the role of the earliest Vinča culture in the emergence of the LBK, and wherein the ‘LBK-ness’ of this conglomerate lies. Our next small case study goes to a site that shows all the above questions in an even sharper light.

Not far from the Tolna Sárköz and from Alsónyék, another site dating broadly to the same period as Tolna-Mözs, Szederkény-Kukorica-dűlő, will be our next case study. Szederkény is located in the southern Baranya hills

of south-east Transdanubia (Fig. 5.1). The excavation of the site was conducted along the planned M6 motorway. It was carried out by the archaeologists of the Janus Pannonius Museum in Pécs between 2005 and 2007 and totalled over 12ha. The Neolithic settlement features formed three distinct clusters across the eastern, middle and western part of the excavated surface and included typical early Vinča material with some elements of LBK (Jakucs and Voicsek 2015).

As a third case study, we include the Kalocsa Sárköz area on the eastern bank of the Danube, reporting on some of our first results from Fajsz-Garadomb (Fig. 5.1). This site contained a thick sequence of layers with mainly Sopot culture occupation, including a considerable amount of finds with traces of influence from the contemporary early Tisza culture (Bánffy *et al.* 2014).

The Neolithic of the area terminates with the exceptionally dense late Neolithic Lengyel occupation discovered and excavated at Alsónyék, with remains of 122 surface-level, robust timber-framed houses excavated. Many more such buildings could be observed geophysically (Osztás *et al.* 2012; Rassmann *et al.* 2015a; Serlegi *et al.* 2013). Along with the houses, several burial groups with 2300 graves overall were found. About the total number of the Alsónyék Lengyel burials there are no estimates, but it was possible to make some extrapolations by combining the excavated surface and the geophysical data. Almost 9000 Lengyel features were excavated over 25ha, while the entire settlement probably covered 80ha. The immense number and importance of these burials are discussed elsewhere (Osztás *et al.* 2016; Zalai-Gaál 2008; Zalai-Gaál and Osztás 2009; Zalai-Gaál *et al.* 2012); here, we therefore focus on the earlier Neolithic periods within the Sárköz region.

Having given a brief general overview of these sites, we will now focus on a few observations which seem pertinent for each of the three sites, in particular, the presence of ‘unusual’ burials within the settlement areas.

Early Neolithic burials inside ovens from Alsónyék-Bátaszék

The early Neolithic (fifty-eighth to fifty-sixth centuries cal BC) settlement at Alsónyék belongs to the north-western edge of the Balkan cultural complex known as the Starčevo culture. Given its size and the amount of features, Alsónyék stands out from the other known early Neolithic settlements in western Hungary (Kalicz 2011).

In the southern part of the excavated area (subsite 5603), a coherent and considerable early Neolithic settlement concentration was found. Some 500 features were uncovered on about 2.5ha. Most are large irregular pits and pit complexes, varying in size and shape. Besides the roughly 20 fully or partly preserved ditches, several ovens were excavated, often dug into the sides and bases of pits. The approximately 60 dug in or fully subterranean ovens

mostly appear in smaller or larger groups, though there are a few single ones. Numerous burnt daub fragments were found in the fills of the pits, many showing the imprints of wattle structures; other pieces of daub may previously have been part of further, already destroyed subterranean ovens. Roughly half of the ovens were oval or roundish, the others are longish and tubular. The state of preservation varies. The platforms, sometimes hardly burnt, were usually better preserved than the globular upper domes. Most tubular ovens had no domes.

So far, the remains of 25 human individuals with secure early Neolithic dates (17 of these confirmed by radiocarbon dating)¹ have been identified across the site as a whole (Köhler 2015). This number is remarkable, as despite the large geographic distribution of the Starčevo culture, the number of anthropological finds is very low (Köhler 2015; Minichreiter 1999; Paluch 2004; 2007; Zoffmann 2013). Among the skeletons, the number of females and children far exceeds the number of males (Köhler 2015, tab. 1; Naumov 2007, 255; Zoffmann 2013, tab. 1). Although the graves were scattered rather randomly across the site, in

some cases two to four skeletons lay close together and were perhaps related to each other. Some bodies were buried in shallow pits around ovens in a position that cannot easily be characterised as careful burials. Many were found in an extreme, twisted position. Apart from a small vessel in the hands of a skeleton, grave goods are few. A crouched skeleton belonging to an adult male (feature 1061), buried in front of an oven, was covered with fragments of a large, coarsely made bowl (Oross *et al.* 2016a).

Of the 25 Starčevo individuals at Alsónyék only 12 were fully articulated, the others were incomplete or not in full articulation, either due to the preservation of the bones or to the rescue excavation method, although ritual aspects might also be possible. Among the skeletons were seven children, six males and ten females and a further two adults of undeterminable sex (Köhler 2015, tabs 1–2). With two exceptions the orientation of the body could be observed, but shows such a high variability that no consistent pattern emerges. In 17 cases the body position could be ascertained; left-crouched bodies dominate ($n=11$), five individuals were lying on their right side and one was in a prone position.



Figure 5.1. Map of the study area with the main sites mentioned in the text. 1. Fajsz; 2. Alsónyék-Bátaszék; 3. Szederkény-Kukorica-dűlő.

The burials are spread across the whole Starčevo settlement in a relatively even way. A separate space, as mentioned by Kornelija Minichreiter for Galovo (Minichreiter and Botič 2010), could not be observed, though the evaluation of the features and associated finds is not yet finished. The human remains were often found in the fill of pits, however there are some isolated burials. The vast majority are arranged in seven smaller clusters, with two to four skeletal remains in each of these. Two of these concentrations of human remains were found inside workshop areas, both of which consist of several subterranean ovens. Altogether five bodies were buried inside ovens, carefully arranged on their sides on the strongly burnt platforms (features 792, 1362, 1398, 1449 and 1531; Figs 5.2–5.3).

Feature 1398 is the southernmost of a group of three oval or round ovens, all with their openings oriented eastwards. The ovens came to light at the eastern edge of feature 1383, which was probably used as a workshop pit. Oven 1398 was round, had a strongly burnt baking surface and a relatively well-preserved dome. Inside the oven, a

few centimetres above the platform, skull fragments, a few ribs, a thoracic vertebra and a left arm bone fragment were found; all remains belonged to an approximately one-year-old child (Fig. 5.2). The orientation and the body position cannot be determined.

Feature 792 was very similar. In the southern part of the extended pit complex 800, an area including remains of 13 subterranean ovens was documented. Approximately in the centre of this area, one of these ovens, also round, had an opening also facing to the east. Its dome was poorly preserved; its platform was plastered and well-burnt. Inside the oven, again a few centimetres above the platform, an incomplete skull, long bones of the arms and the legs, a few vertebrae, a few ribs, clavicles and scapulae, as well as fragment of the left ilium were found. The bones belonged to a child aged between 6 and 8 years. The body was oriented south–north and lay on its left side, placed very close to the oven's back wall. The central part of the skeleton (most lumbar and thoracic vertebrae and the bones of the pelvis) was mostly missing (Fig. 5.2).



Figure 5.2. Human remains inside ovens from Alsónyék (clockwise from top left: features 1398, 792, 1449, 1362).

Feature 1362 is again an oval oven, although somewhat larger and slightly elongated. Its narrowing opening also faces east. It was situated in the southernmost part of the excavated area, near three other hearths. The baking surface was well-burnt, but hardly anything remained of the dome. On the platform a complete and relatively well-preserved skeleton was found. It belonged to an adult woman, aged between 30 and 40 years. Her skull was in a fragmented state. On Figure 5.2, only the upper part of the body can be seen, as the other bones were removed during the rescue excavation. The rest of the body, the *in situ* remains, revealed that the body was laid on its back, the head turned to the left, while the arms were probably raised in an upright position. We have no information about the original position of the lower half of the body.

Feature 1449, located at the eastern edge of the excavation, is a large, oval oven with a well-preserved and plastered platform and a low dome with a surrounding small oval pit. Its opening faced east. On the platform, a well-preserved and complete skeleton of a 17–18-year-old woman was placed. The body is right-crouched, the skull, which was partly destroyed by the machine, was leaning on the edge of the oven (Fig. 5.2).

Feature 1531 is perhaps the most interesting. It is situated in pit complex 800, in the northern cluster of eight ovens. The oval oven has a well-preserved complete dome with two ‘chimneys’ (Fig. 5.3). Its opening faced south-east. Inside, close to the back wall, a complete right-crouched skeleton with an almost perfect north–south orientation was found. Except for the fragmented skull, the skeleton was complete and belonged to an adult female, aged between 40 and 50 years. Furthermore, in the middle of the northern ‘chimney’ a cranial fragment consisting of frontal, parietal and occipital bones was found. It possibly belongs to another female adult, aged between 30 and 50 years.

These five investigated individuals all shared more than one quite commonly occurring disease, such as porotic hyperostosis or *spondylosis deformans*. The latter is an illness common across the entire osteological material from early Neolithic Alsónyék. The skeletons inside the five ovens belonged either to children (features 1398 and 792) or to women (features 1362, 1449 and 1531).

There were no objects that could be interpreted as grave goods. The bones did not show traces of fire; the small blackish discolorations observed may have been caused by the ash from the platform. From this last observation, it follows that the dead were placed inside the ovens at a time when these features were no longer in use. All ovens with burials are of the same type, the only small difference are the chimney-like openings in feature 1531. The tubular, longish ovens did not contain any human skeletal remains.

The burial custom reported here has so far not yet been observed in a Starčevo context. Thus, the human remains from the subterranean ovens at Alsónyék represent a new

facet of the burial rituals of Starčevo communities. In general terms, the burial ritual of the early Neolithic seems to differ considerably from later Neolithic customs over the whole Carpathian basin and south-east Europe. On average Starčevo sites, complete skeletons or human skeletal parts usually lie scattered between settlement features or are buried in pits within the settlements, but are not concentrated in grave groups. As at Alsónyék, the number of burials uncovered does not show any correlation with the possible number of inhabitants of a settlement (Borić 2015; Lichter 2001; Minichreiter 1999; Naumov 2007, 255; Paluch 2004, 2007; Perlès 2001). Also, while most ‘unusual’ burials contain disarticulated human remains (Chapman 2010, 32–5; Croucher 2010), nothing speaks for a possible mutilation of the Alsónyék Starčevo skeletons. Nevertheless, they can be regarded as exceptional, atypical or special burial forms (Perlès 2001, 274).

Since most early Neolithic skeletons deposited near or inside houses or connected to ovens are those of children and women, we can presume that they were in some way symbolically related to the house (Bačvarov 2003, 28, 60, 87–8; Naumov 2007, 257, 259; Raczky 1982/83; Souvatzi 2012, 33), even if no dwellings were detectable at the Alsónyék settlement. Skeletons placed in an embryonic position inside houses, especially in closed and dark spots such as inside jars or ovens, might express the idea of returning to the maternal womb (Bačvarov 2008; Bánffy 1990/91; Gimbutas 1989, 148–9, 151; Naumov 2007, 258). Setting out from this possibility, the dark and closed space may have been the crucial factor when choosing a burial place, rather than the fact that this place happened to be a subterranean oven. Perhaps these features offered an especially strong connotation with the ‘dark’ and the ‘closed’. The idea of burying the dead on the heavily burnt oven or fireplace platforms finds parallels for instance in the Thessalian Dimini culture, at Visviki Magula (Alram-Stern and Dousougli-Zachos 2015, 87, Taf. 28–9). Interestingly, this is also an infant burial.

The subterranean ovens uncovered at Alsónyék were dug inside pit complexes used for work activities and thus they were definitely not linked to any specific dwelling structures. Rather, outdoor cooking or baking activities can probably be associated with these groups of oval ovens. These areas of ovens may have been of special significance in social life. Open spaces with ovens may have been the venues for communal interactions both in everyday life and during feasts, with sharing food, telling stories and reviving memories (Matthews 2012, 200–1, 209). ‘The hearth is the symbol of the household, since it is the meeting place of male and female labour at which is created the source of sustenance for reproduction of the household’ (Haaland 2007, 169). This is the place where food is transformed from a natural to a cultural product, and hence food is not only for the body, but also ‘food for thought’, a medium

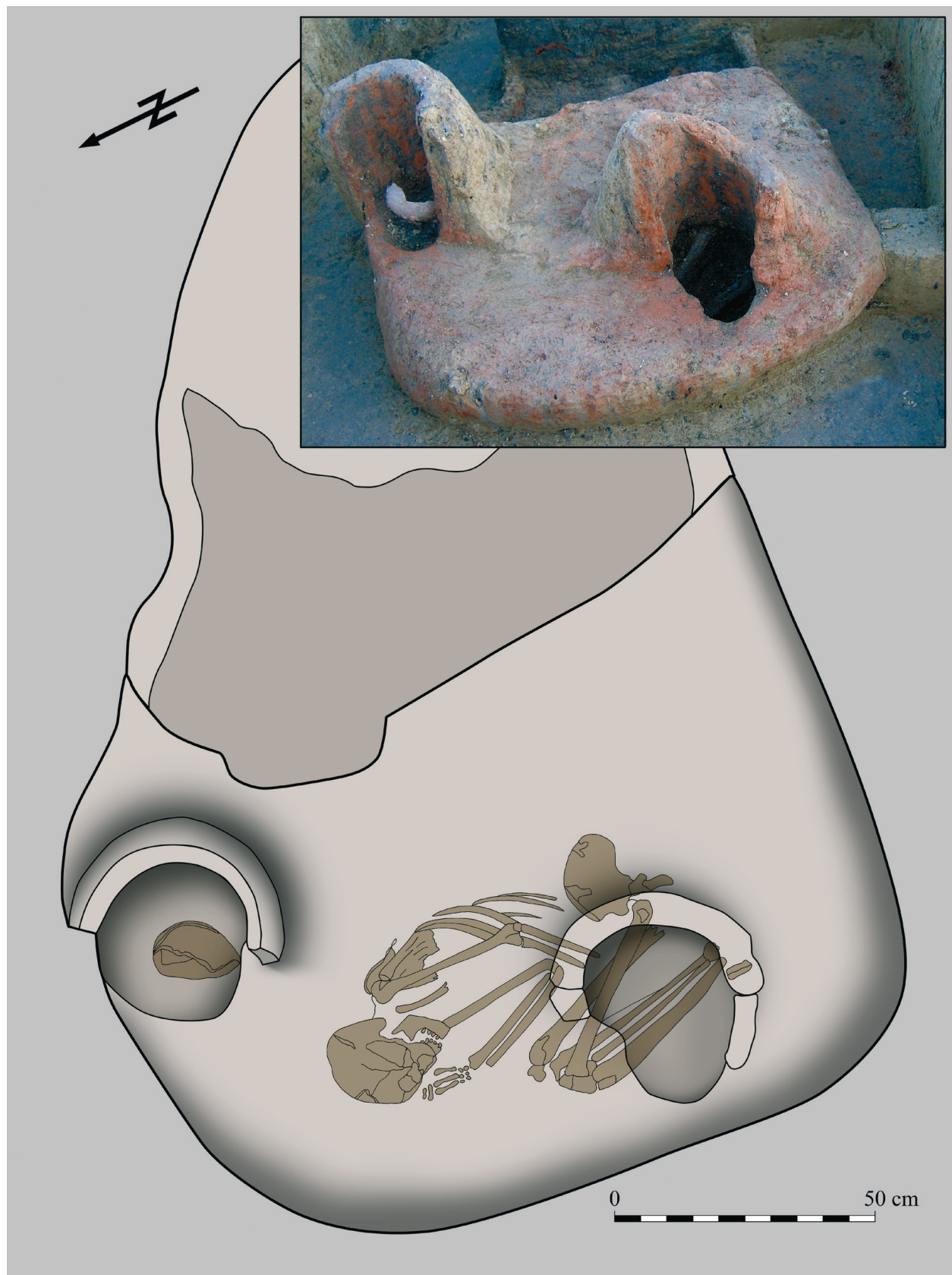


Figure 5.3. Feature 1531 from Alsónyék: a complete human skeleton and part of a fragmented skull found inside an oven.

for initiating and maintaining social relations (Haaland 2007, 169–70).

Special burials at Szederkény-Kukorica-dűlő

South-west of the Alsónyék site, Szederkény lies among the south Transdanubian hills. A total of 66 Neolithic house plans could be excavated in the three parts of this settlement. Although traces of the internal wooden architectural structures are poorly preserved, and no more than a few postholes could be documented, the buildings can confidently be identified from the longpits flanking both sides of the houses. The layout fully matches the general architectural principles of the central European LBK. The reconstructed house plans were without exception oriented north-east to south-west and arranged into a few parallel rows. The archaeological material of the households in the eastern and central parts of the site is characterised by the early Vinča pottery style (Vinča A1–A2 after Wolfram Schier's (1996) chronological system) along with some scattered elements of the early central European LBK. On the other hand, the pottery inventory of the houses in the western settlement part is best matched by the ceramics of the Ražište type within the Sopot circle, which appears to be a local variant of the early Vinča pottery tradition in the Danube region of southern Hungary and north-east Croatia. The combination of the early Vinča and Ražište ceramic repertoire with longhouse architecture that is otherwise familiar from the LBK world makes a detailed investigation of this mix of things and practices possible and puts the issue of cultural entanglement into particularly sharp focus (Jakucs and Voicsek 2015; Jakucs *et al.* 2016).²

A total of 50 Neolithic settlement inhumations were uncovered at Szederkény, the overwhelming majority in the eastern (24) and the western (23) settlement parts. The deceased were buried in own grave pits or in refuse pits, while some of the graves had been dug into sections of the longpits flanking the houses. The deceased were laid to rest in a crouched position; among the better preserved bodies, the majority were crouched on their left side. Only a few settlement burials contained grave goods or artefacts that had been part of burial clothing (Jakucs and Voicsek 2015).

Feature 3036, a roughly oval pit complex in the western settlement part, contained the remains of four individuals (Fig. 5.4). These deserve special attention due to the placement of the deceased and the associated funerary rites. A double burial came to light in the middle of the pit complex, with two bodies in crouched position, with slightly bent arms and knees, oriented in the same direction. The term 'double burial' is used in a rather peculiar sense here, as the second body was buried exactly on top of the first. The lower skeleton (burial 3051) was laid on its left side, the upper one (burial 3050) on its right side. The faces of the two deceased persons were turned towards each other.

Numerous animal bones and fragments of different vessels were found lying on and around the skeletons, apparently scattered above the bodies (Fig. 5.4a–c). As the pottery fragments typologically belong to the Ražište style, and given the modelled radiocarbon date (5210–5180 *cal BC*, 95% probability) from the upper skeleton (Jakucs *et al.* 2016), the double burial can be dated to the late period of the settlement.

A further two bodies were deposited on a ledge along the north-eastern side of the pit complex. Both individuals were found in left-crouched positions; one burial (burial 3036) was oriented east–west, the other (burial 3029) north–south. The latter was the skeleton of a child (infans II, c. 14 years old), it was entirely covered with fragments of large storage vessels (Fig. 5.4a, b, b1).

Multiple burials from the second half of the sixth millennium *cal BC* are not unique; nevertheless, cases with clear indications that the deceased were deliberately buried in a common grave pit are rare. They most frequently occur in the central European LBK area (e.g. Otzing, Aiterhofen and Sengkofen), where they are mostly either remains of children, or of one adult and one child buried together (Hofmann 2009, 230; Nieszery 1995; Peschel 1992). In the Carpathian basin, the best analogies to the double burial are found in the central part of a pit complex from Budapest-Skála Áruház, and at Cífer-Pác in western Slovakia. In these cases, the deceased of roughly the same age were buried in common grave pits, they were oriented in the same direction and placed side by side (Bistáková and Pažinová 2010; Horváth and Horváth 2013). However, in all the above examples the deceased were placed into a common grave probably at the same time, in the course of one single burial action. In the Szederkény case, although the two bodies were positioned exactly on top of each other, it could be clearly observed that there was a 30cm thick layer of soil between them, which contained ceramic fragments (mainly from in between the skulls). According to this stratigraphic situation, it seems very likely that the two burials should be regarded as two separate events, even if the time span between them remains unknown. The careful laying out of the upper individual and the symmetrical arrangement of the two bodies, however, clearly indicate two circumstances. First, that the two individuals must have been closely related during their lives; and second, that the Szederkény Neolithic community had a firm intention of creating memories through this arrangement by burying the second person in the grave complex. After the second funeral, as a closing act of the sequence, the grave was covered with smashed pottery pieces of both storage vessels and fine ceramics. The closed context of this assemblage directly above the deceased excludes an interpretation of these finds as naturally accumulated or residual. Also, some articulated animal remains, i.e. pieces of meat, were lying among the potsherds as possible traces of a funerary feast.

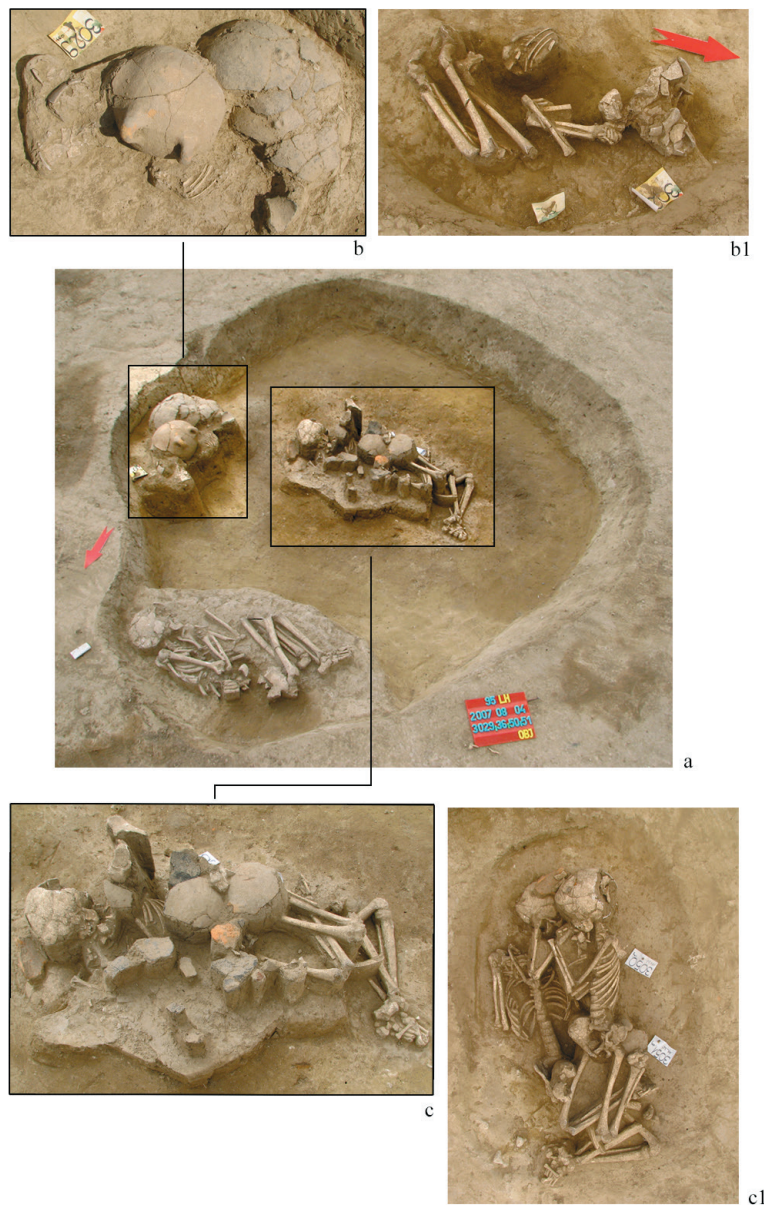


Figure 5.4. Pit 3036 from Szederkény-Kukorica-dűlő, which contained remains of four individuals. Images labelled b1 and c1 were taken at a lower depth than b and c, respectively.

Taken together, the sherds and animal bones can perhaps be considered as the sign of a repetitive mortuary rite during and possibly also after the funerals.

The other ‘unusual’ inhumation within the same pit complex is the child burial covered by sherds (burial 3029). According to the *in situ* observation, the whole body was hidden under the fragments of two large storage jars carefully placed on the dead body. There were no other finds or grave goods.

The custom of burying human remains – often cremated or otherwise manipulated – inside a ceramic vessel occurs in the early Neolithic Körös culture in the Carpathian basin.

For instance, burnt human skull remains were found inside the anthropomorphic vessel at Gorzsa (Gazdapusztai 1957, 12, tabs I.3, II). There is a series of similar, well documented cases within the early farming communities both in south-east and central Europe (Bačvarov 2006; Naumov 2007, 260; Orelle 2008; Sebők 2013, 254). Yet, the action of covering the deceased with pottery fragments, while the vessel did not serve as a ‘container’ of the body, should be understood as the closing stage in an unusual funerary rite, which probably refers to a specific, local mortuary habit. A later (fifth millennium cal BC) similar instance, a special version of the so-called ‘jar burials’, was found at

late Neolithic Aygi in Greece. Here, small pots containing cremated human bones were covered with fragments of large storage vessels: perhaps a similar, but differently adapted ritual (Stratouli *et al.* 2010).

Apart from the example of a Starčevo burial covered by a huge storage vessel from Alsónyék (Oross *et al.* 2016a), this practice has been recently discussed with examples dating to the second half of the sixth millennium cal BC in the Carpathian basin (Sebők 2013). The common element in this practice is that all recorded examples, just like in Szederkény, are remains of children or young individuals. From Transdanubia, only two similar cases have been documented from this period (Bölcske-Gyűrűsvölgy and Paks-Gyapa), both from settlements located along the right bank of the Danube, north of Szederkény (Füzesi 2013; Sebők 2013). There are also a few similar features from the Alföld region (Kántorjánosi-Homoki-dűlő and Pusztataskony-Ledence); both belong to the later phases of the Alföld LBK (Füzesi 2012; Sebők 2013). Interestingly, to the best of our knowledge, there are no perfect analogies to this practice south of the Carpathian basin from the seventh to sixth millennium cal BC, and it is also hard to find similar phenomena in the western LBK funerary rite. Although the data are quite scattered, it can be assumed that covering the bodies of the young deceased with pottery fragments is a custom peculiar to the zone where the first south-east European farming communities reached their northernmost settlement boundaries. This assumption would match the fact that the Sárköz and south Transdanubia were the last areas directly reached by early Balkan farmers along with their south-east European early Neolithic culture.

The concentration of burials in a particular context is not an unusual feature in sixth millennium cal BC settlements (Bánffy *et al.* 2010; Minichreiter and Botić 2010; Oross and Marton 2012). Nevertheless, that no further finds from other parts of the pit came to light confirms our assumption that the bodies were not buried secondarily into an already used refuse pit, but that the structure was specifically created for use in repeated ritual actions. Although the relationship of the four buried individuals and the time-span between the start and end of the funerals remain uncertain, the special rite and the repeated disposal of the dead might shed some light on a kind of continuity of symbolic practices in the Neolithic of the region.

A unique secondary burial from Fajsz-Garadomb

The enigmatic amalgamation of some repeatedly occurring southern impulses with the existing manifold cultural picture becomes even more complex by the addition of yet another impact: that of the north Balkan Sopot groups. The discovery of an intensive Sopot occupation at the turn of the sixth to the fifth millennium cal BC at Alsónyék can be regarded as evidence for the above-mentioned multiple impulses from

the Balkans. At this spot, about ten large pits, small sections of four more or less parallel ditches and 20 burials were excavated. In spite of the relatively few features, a very rich finds assemblage came to light. Most graves contained grave goods: pots, *Spondylus* ornaments and chipped and polished stone artefacts (Oszás *et al.* 2012).

The skeletally robust bodies from the Sopot settlement of Fajsz-Garadomb provide a firm osteological and archaeological basis for tracing several archaic features of this group. Taken together, all aspects seem to match the ancient DNA picture, which unsurprisingly showed that the Neolithic gene pool of south-eastern origin was complemented with a considerable amount of U-haplotypes (Szécsényi-Nagy 2015; Szécsényi-Nagy *et al.* 2014; 2015). After the arrival of the first farmers of Balkan origin in the Sárköz and Transdanubia, such a complementary pre-Neolithic signal in the genetic picture appeared for the first time with the Vinča and Sopot people. Our third case study thus turns to the Sopot occupation of the eastern, Kalocsa Sárköz. This area has been investigated by our work group since the early 2000s, in the form of field surveys, geomagnetic prospection, boring and excavations that primarily concentrated on two coeval and neighbouring sites. One of these is the Fajsz-Kovácsalom tell, an eroded but still magnificent settlement mound, the most north-westerly Neolithic settlement of this type in Europe. It lies in the immediate vicinity of the Danube and was surrounded by a former branch of the river. Coring and geophysical investigations indicate a tell settlement with a 280cm thick sequence. Meanwhile, the current state of preservation of the site allows to estimate the extent of erosion (Rassmann *et al.* 2015b, 5). The other site, lying just 2km south-east, was initially thought to be a horizontal site: Fajsz-Garadomb.

These two sites have been long known as places with settlement traces from almost all archaeological periods, from the early Neolithic to late medieval times. Especially important is their occupation at the turn of the sixth to the fifth millennium cal BC, when both became major settlements of the Sopot culture, which is related to the Vinča population groups and like them arrived to the Sárköz area from the northern Balkans by crossing the rivers Dráva and Danube. The Fajsz-Garadomb site contained an 80cm thick sequence of Neolithic cultural layers, including at least one unburnt Sopot house. Given the probably coeval settlement layers of the two sites in Fajsz, it is possible that the ‘horizontal’ Garadomb site was abandoned for some reason by the Sopot people, who then continued to inhabit Kovácsalom, which evolved to a tell settlement. Further investigations could answer the question whether Garadomb had the same potential of development. Initial phases of tell sites can also be observed elsewhere on the Hungarian Plain, for instance at Öcsöd-Kováshalom, to name one contemporaneous example possibly related to Fajsz (Raczky 1986; 2009; Raczky *et al.* 1985).

Three excavation campaigns were carried out at Fajsz-Garadomb from 2006 to 2008, uncovering 600m² and documenting the remains of several different periods (e.g. late Copper Age, late Bronze Age, Avar Period etc.). Yet the vast majority of features, mainly large pits, can be connected to the Sopot culture occupation (Bánffy *et al.* 2014, 354). This includes four graves reflecting different funerary practices, although two of the bodies were buried in a supine position, which is exceptional in the Neolithic context, where the crouched position dominates. Extended bodies lying on their back are atypical for the Neolithic in the Carpathian basin, but are known from other Sopot sites in Transdanubia, for example Alsónyék or Bicske-Galagonyás (Makkay *et al.* 1996; Osztás *et al.* 2012). A more distant example for this rare ritual comes from the late Neolithic cemetery of Kisköre in the Tisza region (Kórek 1989, 39–45, figs 23–9).

The four graves of the Fajsz-Garadomb settlement come from two distinct areas, as is typical for Sopot burials in Transdanubia (Regenye in press). One of the four graves from Garadomb (feature 156) is the inhumation of a 30–40-year-old man, lying extended on his back in a regular grave pit, overlain by an oval settlement pit (feature 96). Different kinds of grave goods were found in the grave:

ceramic vessels, *Spondylus* ornaments, chipped stone and bone tools. Feature 96 was in turn cut by the grave of a 0.5–1-year-old child (feature 157). Although its position could not be precisely observed, the child lay inside a further regular grave pit and was buried together with a *Spondylus* ornament.

The other small group of graves was uncovered approximately 20m away and was also related to an extensive oval settlement pit (feature 71). Inside this pit, the manipulated remains of a human individual were placed (Fig. 5.5). This is a collection of bones, not in anatomical order, of a 25–30-year-old male (feature 65) whose bones were secondarily arranged some time after his death, when soft tissues had decayed. The remains lay in a small depression close to the base of the pit, amidst a mixture of settlement refuse; however, two small clay human figurines accompanied the human remains. The skull and long bones were meticulously placed together, while the ribs were laid crossways under the long bones (Fig. 5.5). The whole assemblage was found in an almost perfectly round shape, so it is possible that the bones were packed in an organic container or wrapped in cloth, thus preventing the careful arrangement from falling apart. In spite of the fact that

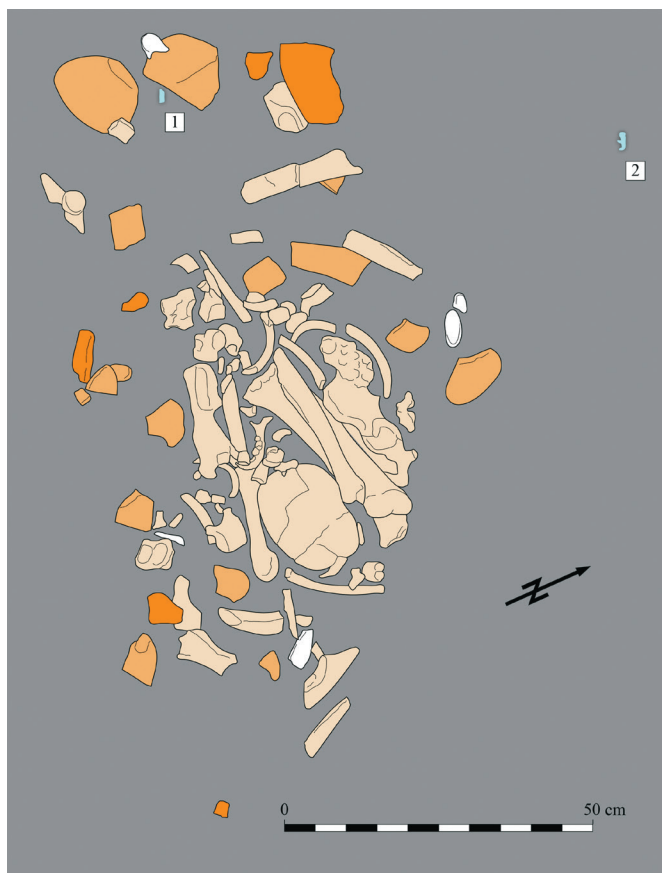


Figure 5.5. Feature 65 from Fajsz-Garadomb: secondary burial. Orange: daub fragment, light orange: sherd, white: freshwater shell, light blue: clay figurines.

the bones were placed in a refuse pit, some circumstances indicate that this burial was somehow connected to the others in this grave group.

Apparently, this burial is the result of some kind of post-mortem treatment. Such cases have been discussed by both archaeologists and osteologists in order to ascertain if the activity related to some violent act like cannibalism (Orschiedt 1999) or to a ritual to clean the bones of soft tissue (Kuijt 1996, 321; Schulting *et al.* 2015, 38). In some cases, bones found in secondary positions with cut marks allow both interpretations (Gligor and McLeod 2015). Further south-east of the Carpathian basin, e.g. in the Aegean Neolithic, it is unclear whether these mortuary practices reflect particular types of social organisation, or whether there is disjuncture between burial customs and other aspects of social life (Borić 2015, 939). Nevertheless, the manipulation of the body is not unknown in the Transdanubian Sopot orbit either: one of the burials at Bicske-Galagonyás (grave 1) had one leg, still in anatomical connection, redeposited under his head (Makkay *et al.* 1996, 20, fig. 6). The custom of mutilating the bodies before or during burial continues in the great variety of ‘*Sonderbestattungen*’ in the Lengyel culture, which in many aspects was influenced by the Sopot communities (Chapman 2000; Zalai-Gaál 2009).

The Fajsz-Garadomb secondary burial does not show any traces of violence; on the contrary, the disarticulated bones rather reflect a new, careful, almost artistic re-articulation of the body of the deceased man. Moreover, the orientation of the long bones and the skull, as well as the small depression containing the bones, had the same, south-east–north-west orientation as the other burials at the site. Taken together, this assemblage can be regarded as a memorial act similar to a cenotaph, a symbolic grave. Cenotaphs do not contain human remains, yet often have grave goods and indicate care

and respect for a deceased person who, presumably, could not be buried together with his/her fellows in the community. Among the 368 graves found in the early Lengyel cemetery at Zengővárkony are some cenotaphs with grave goods similar to regular inhumations (Chapman 2010; Dombay 1960; Zalai-Gaál 1984). Cenotaphs are often interpreted as if they were normal graves within the cemetery, since although they lack bones they often have grave goods matching the social status and merits of the deceased person. In the Fajsz-Garadomb secondary burial the bones are present, but the whole arrangement suggests closer similarities with cenotaphs rather than with disarticulated or especially with mutilated burials.

Besides the careful arrangement of the skull with the long bones and smaller skeletal parts, wrapping the assemblage in some organic material in the pit and the similar orientation within the small grave, yet another circumstance suggests a cenotaph-like interpretation of the assemblage. This is the presence of the two small clay figurines.

The finds lying on and around this secondary burial could be considered as the normal fill of the refuse pit. However, the two female figurines (Fig. 5.6) look rather like traces of an intentional deposit related to the burial. They are similar in size, the flat shape of the body is typical for both of them and the broken arms and legs may have been in a similar position. Both figurines are fragmented, probably broken intentionally along the longitudinal axes of their bodies. This fragmenting action could have been easy due to an internal perforation that runs parallel to the long axis. One figurine has a deeply incised meander decoration, quite typical for both early Tisza vessel decorations and early Tisza figural representations (Fig. 5.6, 1).

Having said that the secondary burial was found inside a refuse pit, we need to explain why we interpret the burial and the two figurines as connected, and the latter



Figure 5.6. Fragmented clay figurines unearthed in feature 65 from Fajsz-Garadomb.

as possible grave goods for the deceased. There is a clear stratigraphic connection between the secondary burial and the figurines. These were placed exactly on the base of the small depression created inside the pit, to accompany the small parcel in its organic container, hiding the bones. Both figurines were placed at a distance of c. 40cm from the skull.

There are some further, interesting implications regarding these small clay figurines. Since both show strong connections with early Tisza incised motives and figural art (Bánffy 1985; Raczky 1986, fig. 8; 1987), they could indicate long-distance connections with the east, beyond the river Tisza. So, besides offering an interesting chronological anchor within the Sopot and early Tisza phases, the clay figurines may reveal something about the place where the man possibly died. This is certainly thin ice, but there could be a small chance that the deceased man, who must have been buried somewhere far from Fajsz-Garadomb until only his bones remained, may have been brought back to his original home settlement from the east, from the Tisza region. Following this line of thought, the small figurines that must be imported from that area may have been meant to accompany his remains to their final resting place. This would not only explain the occurrence of two imported objects buried together with someone who died far from Fajsz, but would also be a strong indication for an emotional link between this man and some early Tisza communities.

Certainly, the option must also be borne in mind that the two small figurines had been discarded earlier and were simply found while placing the secondary burial. Yet it still remains a fact that the figurines were laid symmetrically under the secondary burial. This connection alone is interesting. Across the Neolithic of the Carpathian basin and in most areas of south-east and central Europe, thousands of small clay figurines are known, but – with very few exceptions – exclusively from domestic contexts. They occur within houses or in cultural layers around houses, often thrown into garbage pits (Bánffy 1990/91). Figurines did belong to the living and not to the dead; they were not used as grave goods. No matter if the Fajsz-Garadomb figurines were brought to the site together with the remains of the deceased young man or were accidentally found in the pit while preparing the small depression: figurines were used in a burial act at this Sopot site.

The pit that contained the secondary burial was also cut by a regular grave pit with a further burial (feature 165, an inhumation of a 30–40-year-old man). This skeleton was found at the base of the feature, also in a supine position. In both cases, the orientation of the bodies was south-east–north-west; the position of the skull fragments of the child burial also fit this orientation, as does the secondary burial.

Discussion

This short paper began with a discussion of some unique, almost bizarre burials of the earliest farmers at Alsónyék

in the western, Tolna Sárköz, dating to the beginning of the sixth millennium cal BC. We then moved to some specially arranged nearby graves from the intriguing amalgamation of LBK and southern Vinča groups from Szederkény, dated to the last centuries of the sixth millennium cal BC. Third, an example from the eastern, Kalocsa Sárköz was presented: an unusual secondary burial from the Sopot settlement at Fajsz-Garadomb. This group, similar to the Vinča people, arrived from the south at the turn of the sixth and fifth millennium cal BC. These special burial customs can be interpreted as manifestations of a broader regional development.

Despite the still limited number of burials from the sixth millennium cal BC, we have sufficient information to outline the mortuary practices of the investigated area. Inhumation graves within settlements in a crouched position, with a clear preference of the left crouched variant, could be regarded as regular both for the Starčevo (Paluch 2004; 2007) and the LBK communities of the Carpathian basin (Oross and Marton 2012). Burials were associated with residential areas, formal cemeteries have not yet been discovered in western Hungary. In the case of the LBK, this is all the more conspicuous when compared with the extensive burial grounds of more westerly areas of central Europe (Nieszery 1995; Peschel 1992) and with the smaller-scale but existing evidence for cemeteries from Slovakia (Bistáková and Pažinová 2010; Pavúk 1972). The Szederkény site shares the same tradition as the LBK settlements of the region. The Sopot burial ground from Alsónyék represents a period that witnessed substantial transformations in the sense that burial places were not yet completely separated from the settlements, but graves occurred in a compact cluster in an area that had already lost its original function (Oross *et al.* 2016b). The location of the Fajsz-Garadomb graves and their relationship to other features of the site resembles earlier traditions.

The case studies cover the first millennium of sedentary life in the region, when burial places and the scene of everyday life overlap each other, at least in the archaeological record. They also reveal the complexity of rituals associated with death and aspects of mortuary practices that are rare or unusual when compared with those considered regular. These customs and habits were probably regarded as extraordinary treatments by contemporary community members. Nevertheless, they were an integral part of the local and regional tradition; our judgement about irregularity is based on the currently known data. The phenomena presented above must have been rooted in a ritual of social memory-making by burying the dead in special ways within the settlement.

Investigating the early fifth millennium Sárköz occupation, the Lengyel period that partially overlapped with the Sopot phase must be at least briefly mentioned. At Alsónyék, at a place where nobody expected a major site, i.e. in the vicinity of well-known and important settlements (including the eponymous site of Lengyel), the immense surface uncovered contained more than a hundred large houses, with many more visible on the geophysics plot – and no less than

2300 graves. This is only the number of excavated burials. Among the burials are many with exceptional grave goods, similar to, but even richer and more numerous than those from Fajsz-Garadomb. Some graves were even covered by a large construction, a kind of ‘house of the dead’.

While this study is emphatically not touching upon questions of the Lengyel period burial rite, it has to be borne in mind that all three previous phases, which together encompass the millennium before the onset of the Lengyel settlement of the Sárköz, should somehow be regarded as forerunners. We now know that a series of cultural (and genetic) elements of the first farmers, the people of the Starčevo group, survived for a long time, whilst they constantly underwent changes due to both social restructuring and new cultural (and genetic) input from the northern Balkans. In this sense, each of the special burial customs taken from almost the entire sixth millennium cal BC, from the Starčevo, LBK, Vinča and Sopot sites of the Sárköz, throws a special light upon the enormously rich Lengyel burial rituals of the first half of the fifth millennium cal BC.

Thus, the present short paper is a record of some possible local antecedents for the specifically rich Lengyel mortuary traditions – a theme that has been our largest concern, perhaps, within our long and happy cooperation with Alasdair – and hereby, an expression of our respect, honour and friendship to Alasdair.

Notes

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- 2 In 2013–2014, samples taken from the human burials as well as from articulated animal bones recovered from various settlement features were submitted for radiocarbon dating as part of the research project *The Times of Their Lives* funded by the European Research Council. We would here like to thank Alasdair Whittle and Alex Bayliss, the Principal Investigator and Co-Investigator of the research project, for making these analyses possible.

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